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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 003670

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR MX
SUBJECT: LEFT-OF-CENTER CONVERGENCIA PARTY STRUGGLING TO
MAINTAIN FOOTING

REF: MEXICO 3594

Classified By: POLCOUNS CHARLES BARCLAY, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: With legislative elections next summer that could determine its fate as a political party, Mexico's small left-of-center Convergencia is casting around for strategies that will help maintain its viability. On December 10, the party cemented a new alliance with the small, far-left Labor Party (PT) to compete jointly in the elections. Party members have also said their organization seeks to capture disaffected PRD members to shore up its base. However, many doubt either of these moves will significantly improve the party's electoral fortunes. End Summary.

¶2. (C) With neither a stand-out agenda to distinguish itself from the larger parties, nor a robust national base, Convergencia has been politically anemic since its founding nearly ten years ago. Leaders of the ten year old party describe themselves as "European-style" social democrats and say their party's membership is drawn from Mexico's professional elite, particularly from among younger progressive Mexicans. However, like other small parties, Convergencia's ideology is diffuse and difficult to pin down, and while it has attracted some younger activists in urban areas, it remains largely nested in the state of Veracruz, where its current President, Dante Delgado, served a controversial term as PRI governor in the late 1980s.

¶3. (C) Convergencia's move to join forces with the PT, an organization that describes itself the last remaining Marxist-Leninist party in Mexico, is characteristically opportunistic, say Mexico's more cynical observers. These describe the party as a money making machine designed to maintain enough popular support and a legislative presence to ensure its leaders access to public funding, as well as a platform for cantankerous politicians who have alienated their former parties (such as PRI, in Delgado's case). This year, ideology is clearly secondary to the struggle to stay afloat.

¶4. (SBU) The party has registered some short-term gains, and its leaders in recent weeks have reached out to us to explain themselves and outline their hopes for the future. At its December 5 celebration, Poloff was accorded a place of honor at one of the head tables and told of the lofty ambitions party members harbor. The fete was held a few weeks after Convergencia and PT broke relations with the PRD. Media had also recently reported that an estimated 10,000 rank and file

PRD members had defected and signed up with Convergencia.

¶ 15. (C) Adan Perez, the party's elections coordinator, confidently predicted to Poloff that his organization would emerge from the 2009 elections as Mexico's third most powerful political force. Alejandro Chanona, Convergencia's legislative coordinator, made a similar boast in a meeting with another Poloff earlier in the week.

¶ 16. (SBU) In reality, many observers here believe the party will have trouble capturing the two percent of the vote it needs to retain its registration as a political party. Recent polls show its support at about one percent.

¶ 17. (SBU) The party pulled 2.3 percent of the vote in 2003 legislative elections, but its best showing was in 2006, when it allied with PRD. Through horse-trading that is now prohibited by the 2007 electoral reform law, it garnered 17 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and two in the Senate. The new electoral law, however, stipulates that each party's representation in congress will be strictly based on the vote it captures, curtailing the ability of coalitions to decide the distribution of seats among members.

¶ 18. (SBU) Other changes codified by the 2007 law will also make it harder for Convergencia (and most small parties) to maintain footing. Distribution of 70 percent of public campaign advertising time now required to be set aside by the major broadcasters will be based on each party's representation in congress, giving a significant advantage to the three big parties. In addition, each party in a

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coalition must appear on the ballot under its own logo, rather than the coalition logo, which gives further advantage to the larger, already well-branded parties.

¶ 19. (C) These changes -- and the support most PRD legislators gave to the reforms -- engendered much bitterness on the part of the small leftist parties. Alejandro Chanona told Poloff that his party had decided months ago that it wasn't in its interest to remain on the same ticket with PRD for the 2009 legislative elections. In addition to the alliance with PT, he said, Convergencia hopes to recruit popular non-party local leaders as candidates, work with disaffected PRD members and encourage failed PRD presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to campaign for Convergencia candidates in constituencies where PRD was weak. The hard-line PRD standard bearer has already expressed willingness to go to bat for the small coalition.

¶ 10. (C) Comment: None of these strategies may work. Even with their resources and fortunes married, Convergencia and PT, with their small cadres of activists, will be hard pressed to expand their national base. Lopez Obrador provides some value-added, but his popularity is waning. While he may be eyeing one of the smaller leftist parties should he choose to leave the PRD, he will be putting most of his energy into getting his hard-line supporters elected on the PRD ticket. Some observers say the three mainstream parties knew exactly what they were doing in changing Mexico's electoral regime last year: ridding Mexico's partisan landscape of the clutter of smaller parties. Despite their best efforts, Convergencia and PT may fall victim next July. End Comment.

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